

NEWS



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JUSTICE COURTS MARICOPA COUNTY

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Justice Courts to expand crackdown on past-due fines Next stage to target misdemeanor (criminal) offenders

PHOENIX -- The Maricopa County Justice Court system is expanding its crackdown on Maricopa County residents who haven't paid fines or traffic tickets.

The Justice Courts will refer to collection agencies more than 13,000 accounts for unpaid misdemeanor fines. The past-due accounts total more than \$7 million. Offenders have been warned in letters that they have until June 16th to pay their fines before collection agencies take over the accounts and tack on a 28 percent penalty.

"People have to realize that they just can't walk away from their fines," said Presiding Justice of the Peace G.M. Osterfeld of the Buckeye Justice Court. "If they do, they could end up making their next court appearance wearing handcuffs and a jail uniform or owing a lot more than their original fine."

In January, the Justice Courts referred to collections more than \$10 million worth of past-due **civil** traffic tickets. So far they have recovered approximately \$500,000 from that effort. This latest effort is the first time that the Justice Courts will refer misdemeanor, or criminal, fines to collection agencies.

Anyone who has failed to pay a misdemeanor fine and is subsequently stopped by police is subject to immediate arrest.

The move will cost the courts nothing because the agencies will collect their fees through a 28 percent penalty on the past due tickets. Only fines and tickets more than 120 days past due are being turned over to the collection agencies.